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## Spring 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed by graduate student instructors to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

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The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Tuesday, May 23. No exceptions can be made.

## Spring 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

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Instructor's name BENEDETTA LUCIANA SARA CARNAGHI

Department HISTORY Course # and title HIST 4230.103: "A LIFE UNDER COVER: SPIES IN HISTORY, FICTION AND CINEMA"

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"CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISE: CRAFTING A TEXT FOR A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE"  
Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature Benedetta Luciana Sara Carnaghi Date 05/23/17

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**Application for: Spring 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts**

## **Creative Writing Exercise: Crafting a Text for a Specific Audience**

**Abstract:** The goal of this sequence of writing exercises is to teach students to be aware of the intended audience of their texts. It also helps them pay attention to the genre that their text belongs to, the goal(s) that it should accomplish, and the register and rhetorical strategies that they should adopt to accomplish such a goal. Students assume the identity, position, and voice of the characters of the texts they read and of the films they watched.

**Keywords:** awareness of audience; genre; register; rhetorical strategies; creative writing; workshop.

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### **1. Copies of the handouts for students**

#### **WORKSHOP PART 1**

I prepared slips of paper with the following prompts on them. Students were already familiar with all the characters mentioned in the prompts (but I've added a note in parenthesis for the readers of this application). Each student drew a slip of paper from a basket which would be his/her assignment.

1. You are Elizabeth Jennings. You told General Zhukov that Philip lacked loyalty for the Motherland and wanted to defect to America. You changed your mind. You hurry to write a note to General Zhukov to persuade him that Philip is innocent, because you are afraid for his safety. (Note: Characters from the pilot of the TV series *The Americans*.)
2. You are Sylvia. You want to gather support for a "Free Truman" campaign against Christof and the production company of the show. You write an op-ed for *The New York Times* where you disagree with Christof's interview and argue that Truman is held prisoner on the set. (Note: Characters from *The Truman Show*.)
3. You are Sophie Scholl. You heard Joseph Goebbels's speech on the battle of Stalingrad and you want the German people to know that he lied. You write a leaflet to advise people to desert the German army because the Nazis are waging a suicidal war against the Allies. (Note: Students had read Joseph Goebbels's speech on the battle of Stalingrad and one of the leaflets of the "White Rose" Resistance group.)
4. You are Joseph Goebbels. You heard that some members of the Resistance are undermining your efforts to hide the disastrous outcome of the battle of Stalingrad. You write a brief speech where you try to persuade the German people that the members of the Resistance are only cowards who refused to go to war.
5. You are agent Tricycle. Your task is to mislead the German intelligence as to the real location of the imminent Allied invasion. You write a fake news report where you suggest that the invasion will not happen, because the Allies are in possession of very powerful incendiary bombs that they will drop on the main German cities. (Note: Agent described in Ben Macintyre's *Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies* and Hervie Haufler's *The Spies Who Never Were: The True Story of the Nazi Spies Who Were Actually Allied Double Agents*.)
6. You are Frances Myles. Your husband, Richard, does not want you to accompany him in his spying mission because he thinks that it is too dangerous. You do not want to be left behind. You write a letter to persuade him that the mission will be less dangerous if you are there with him, because you will look like a normal married couple on a holiday. (Note: Characters from Helen MacInnes's novel *Above Suspicion*.)

The students' task was to answer the prompt in the right register for the audience that they were supposed to address and for the goal that they ought to accomplish.

## WORKSHOP PART 2

I collected each student's answer and gave it to another student with a new prompt: the students now had the task to play the role of the intended audience of the texts and decide whether they had been convinced or not. These were the prompts that they received:

1. You are General Zhukov. You receive a note from Elizabeth Jennings. She had told you that Philip lacked loyalty for the Motherland and wanted to defect to America. She seems to have changed her mind and is trying to persuade you that Philip is innocent. After reading her note, are you persuaded? Do you believe her? Answer her note.
2. You are a fan of *The Truman Show*. You absolutely love the show and spend several hours watching it every day. You are browsing the Internet to find out the last gossip about the show, but stumble on a *New York Times* op-ed written by a certain Sylvia. She wants to gather support for a "Free Truman" campaign against Christof and the production company of the show. She completely disagrees with Christof's interview and argues that Truman is held prisoner on the set. After reading Sylvia's op-ed, do you change your mind about the show? Write an op-ed for *The New York Times* in response to hers.
3. You are a German citizen. It is 1943. You just heard Joseph Goebbels's speech on the radio. You are walking in the streets of Berlin and find a leaflet written by a certain Sophie Scholl. She is telling you that Goebbels lied on the battle of Stalingrad. She is advising Germans to desert the army because the Nazis are waging a suicidal war against the Allies. You decide to write a response to Sophie's leaflet to... join the Resistance? Or bring the leaflet to the attention of the Gestapo to facilitate her arrest?
4. You are a German citizen. It is 1943. You just heard Joseph Goebbels's speech on the radio. He wants to persuade the German people that the members of the Resistance are only cowards who refused to go to war. After hearing the speech, are you persuaded? Do you believe him? You write a response to the speech in your private diary.
5. You are a member of the Gestapo. You receive a news report from a (supposedly) Nazi intelligence agent, who suggests that the Allied invasion will not happen, because the Allies are in possession of very powerful incendiary bombs that they will drop on the main German cities. Do you find the report reliable? Do you believe the agent? You immediately write to your chief to let him know your thoughts.
6. You are Richard Myles. You decided that your wife Frances should not accompany you in your spying mission to Paris because you do not want her to be in danger. You receive a letter from Frances where she is trying to persuade you that the mission will be less dangerous if she comes with you, because you will look like a normal married couple on a holiday. After reading her letter, are you persuaded? Do you change your mind? Answer Frances's letter and let her know.

**WORKSHOP PART 3**  
**Assessment of classmate's text**

(Note: I have condensed this peer-review sheet for this application; the original provided space for responses.)

In addition to playing the role of the intended audience of the texts and responding to their classmates, the students also had to assess their classmates' texts, answering the following peer-review questions:

1. Did you find the text convincing? Yes? No? Why?
2. Was the length of the text appropriate?
3. Do you think that your classmate used the right register for the audience that he/she was supposed to address?
4. List the rhetorical strategies that your classmate employed and that you found effective.
5. Would the text have accomplished the writer's/speaker's goal?

**2. Explanation of the exercise**

This was an in-class creative writing workshop. The goal of the role play was to compel the students to reflect on the intended audience of their texts. The workshop took two 50-minute sessions.

We started the first one with a discussion of the various *genres* (note; op-ed; leaflet; speech; news report; personal letter) that a text could belong to, the *goals* (persuade; disagree/argue; advise; suggest) that it might accomplish, and the appropriate *register* and *rhetorical strategies* that a writer could adopt to accomplish such goals. I gave the students auxiliary handouts to understand the existing *registers* and *rhetorical strategies*. Then the students picked the prompt and wrote part 1, trying to respect the genre and accomplish the goal of the text that they had to produce. At the end of the first session, I collected their texts and associated each of them with the second prompt.

At the beginning of the second 50-minute session, I distributed the students' responses and the new prompts to their classmates: this time, they had to play the role of the intended audience of the texts and decide whether or not they had been persuaded by them. I also distributed the questionnaire and asked the students to assess the effectiveness of their partner's texts. At the end, each student emailed (or gave a paper copy of) his or her answer to the classmate whose text he or she had responded to. We reconvened as a class and discussed what we had learned from the exercise. The students said that they had enjoyed it.

**3. Example of students' responses**

**PART 1: Seunghyun Han as Sylvia in *The Truman Show***

**"The True Monster Behind *The Truman Show*"**

The United States upholds various rights for its people, from the right to free speech, to the right to bear arms, to the right to liberty. One of these rights that a lot of Americans hold dear is the right to privacy, which, I believe, has been infringed by the production staff of *The Truman Show*. Constant, unnotified surveillance of a private citizen is against the values upon which our very nation was founded, and the release of footage from Truman's personal life to the public is an even further violation of these values. Christof and *The Truman Show*

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production staff should not be seen as “televisionaries”, as I’ve seen them called, but rather as criminals guilty of not only violating Truman’s rights as a private citizen, but also holding him against his will in what is ultimately a garnished prison.

Christof took part in an interview about a week ago on one of the myriad shows affiliated with *The Truman Show*. He started off by boasting about his role in killing off, and then reintroducing Kirk, the man who plays the role of Truman’s father. This nefarious man sat proud of being responsible for emotionally devastating Truman and crippling his development by manipulating his natural bond with his “family”. How the pure insanity of this man isn’t apparent to the public after all these years is beyond me.

As I’m sure some of you avid watchers of the show are aware, I am Sylvia, and I used to work as an actress on the set of *The Truman Show*. I was fired from the show over an incident where I attempted to inform Truman of his true situation, but was stopped by Christof himself before I had the chance to properly convince Truman. Throughout the years after being kicked out, I’ve received constant harassment from the show’s fans, some of whom have even resorted to mailing me death threats.

**PART 2: Ananya Gangadhar’s response as a fan of *The Truman Show***

**“No, Sylvia. Let Truman Be.”**

Last week, as I was surfing the web late one night after watching yet another enjoyable episode of *The Truman Show*, I came across a rather curious article published in *The New York Times*. It was written by none other than Sylvia, who most of us remember as Truman’s controversial love interest in college. She argued about the violation of Truman’s human rights and campaigned to “free him from his prison”. However, the article itself, while passionate and full of emotion, was hardly very convincing.

I remain skeptical of anyone who still calls *The Truman Show* a violation of human rights. Truman has a perfectly good life, with all the comforts and luxuries he could wish for — a cozy home, a beautiful wife, and a loving family. So many of us aren’t half as fortunate as to enjoy a life of such domestic bliss. Truly, Truman’s world is wonderful, and haven’t we all at some point wished to live a life just like that in Seahaven too? There is no worry about the future there, no threat of collapsing stock markets, or global warming, or terrorist attacks.

Another sad trend that Sylvia indulged in in her article was the abuse directed towards the show’s creator and a television icon, Christof. I find it deeply upsetting that people like Sylvia describe him as some sort of a monster. Christof adopted Truman, who was otherwise destined to be a homeless orphan (or even an aborted fetus), in the most legal and above-the-board fashion. He gave Truman a life, and what a life indeed! Truman is the source of unspeakable joy and hope to millions daily, all thanks to Christof and his admirable vision. *The Truman Show* is a rare beacon of light in the ocean of darkness that the real world is. Truman’s life and his world are precious to us all because it they are both so far removed from the taint of the dreary reality that we all must face — a thing beauty and a joy forever, as John Keats would put it.

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So my dear Sylvia, do consider all that I have said before you attempt yet another underhanded scheme to "expose the truth" to Truman. He is happy, and he is safe in Seahaven. The rest of us aren't as fortunate, so let him be because he deserves a life that beautiful in return for all the happiness he has brought to this world.

**PART 3: Ananya Gangadhar's assessment of Seunghyun Han's text**

Ananya Gangadhar  
Responding to: Seunghyun Han

**Creative Writing Exercise: Crafting a Text for a Specific Audience**

**Assessment of your classmate's text:**

1. Did you find the text convincing? Yes? No? Why?  
Personally, yes, but I chose to write the oped as a  
skeptical because it seemed interesting to challenge your text
2. Was the length of the text appropriate?  
Yes. It was just right and the paragraphs were  
well-structured.
3. Do you think that your classmate used the right register for the audience that he was  
supposed to address?  
Mostly yes. However, a more sentimental and less  
academic approach may have better succeeded in  
convincing the audience.
4. List the rhetorical strategies that your classmate employed and that you found effective.
  - Opened with facts very concise and to the point.
  - Very interesting and insightful adjectives
  - Emotionally disturbing ending (that really convinced me!)
5. Would the text have accomplished the writer's/speaker's goal?  
Probably but perhaps you could've used more emotional  
arguments that would connect with the readers?